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ABSTRACT

The role of nine academic vice presidents in managing Christian, liberal arts colleges was assessed, as part of research conducted at Christian or church-related liberal arts colleges that were identified as being well managed by one or more persons. Data collected on the academic vice presidents provided the following profile: the average age was 45.1 years; they had been in their present position an average of 4.9 years; and all were white males. The following management dimensions were common to most of the nine people studied: (1) the academic vice presidents emphasized building relationships with both the president and the faculty; (2) the academic vice presidents saw collegial governance as descriptive of their institutions; (3) academic leadership rested with the academic vice president in a majority of the colleges; (4) the academic vice president's primary management thrust was for improvement of academic quality; and (5) academic vice presidents emphasized some elements of good management including process, leadership, informal organization, communication, and debate of issues. Characteristics of the environment of the nine officials were also considered, including their relationship with the college president and whether faith was affirmed at the college. (SW)

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MANAGEMENT AND THE ACADEMIC VICE PRESIDENT IN THE CHRISTIAN, LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGE

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MANAGEMENT AND THE ACADEMIC VICE PRESIDENT IN THE CHRISTIAN, LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGE

I. Introduction

This study was conducted between June and November of 1984 and involved ten Christian, liberal arts colleges with a reputation for being well managed. This reputation was determined by interviewing individuals at the Council for Independent Colleges, the Christian College Coalition, CASE, CAPHE and NACUBO, professors of higher education at Stanford and SUNY, and presidents of liberal arts colleges. About 175 colleges were nominated by one or more persons and ten were chosen on the basis of intensity and frequency of mention. All ten were visited in the Summer and Fall of 1984 with taped interviews of the president and those reporting to him and, in some cases, faculty and students. Hard data including budgets, audits, application forms, salary schedules, student profiles, biographical information, an analysis of what percent of the budget went to the various parts of the college and enrollment was gathered and analyzed.

A paper was given at Wheaton College in May, 1985 to the Deans Meeting of the Christian College Coalition on management and the president. Today we will be examining management and the academic vice president. In November, I will do a paper on the chief finance officer.

II. Quantifiable Comparisons

Some quantifiable data was gathered on each of the nine academic vice presidents on whom data was available which provides some interesting comparisons. Their average age was 45.1 with all but one of them falling between 41 and 48. They had been in their present position an average of 4.9 years

which means their average age upon entering the positions was 40.2. All were white males who came to the college they were serving an average of 13 years earlier with the actual years ranging from 1958 to 1981. The difference between 13 years at the college and 4.9 is compensated for by the fact that five of the nine served in another capacity at the college prior to becoming the academic vice president (two in teaching, one administration and two in both).

Their previous experience included only two who had been academic vice president at another college (one for one year and one for four years). Their total experience was almost evenly divided between teaching (an average of 10.1 years of full-time teaching) and administration (an average of 9.8 years including the current position). One had been a department chairman. Three had worked in business/industry in research or engineering consulting. In general it might be concluded that prior experience in administration of less responsibility and college teaching (along with their formal education) provided their preparation for what they were doing.

The formal preparation at the graduate level helped to prepare only three of them who took work in higher education administration. Those three probably also had some of the best experience to draw upon. As a result, four entered this position without either administrative experience or graduate work in the field, two had some experience but no graduate work and only three had both graduate work in higher education administration (management) and prior administrative experience (two as chief academic officer). It seems fair to assume from this data, then, that the criteria for selection in these positions dealt with much more than specific preparation in administrative experience and knowledge of the field derived from graduate work.

One of these characteristics was undoubtedly possession of a doctorate in some field. All nine held the earned doctorate with three in higher education, two in physics, one in chemistry, one in aerospace science, one in history and one in philosophy. The doctoral granting schools were one regional university, four Big Ten universities (two from Purdue and one each from Minnesota and Michigan State), two eastern universities (Brown and Princeton) and one western university (Stanford). At the undergraduate level three were graduates of the college where they now serve and four were graduates of other Christian, liberal arts colleges. None went to a major university while three of the nine attended Wheaton. The undergraduate fields were mixed with two in social science and two in chemistry.

All nine were active in their church with five of them indicating their present church membership differed from what it had been. Particularly when noting that not all of the schools were denominational and looking at the specific changes, it was concluded that the changes were insignificant.

III. Dimensions

It has become clearer to me in this study how much the effective president sets the tone for and the reputation of a college. The presidents of these ten institutions were clearly the major factor in establishing the reputation which included them in this study. It was not surprising then to find greater variation among the academic vice presidents with fewer dimensions which describe all of them and even some significant divergence as they approached the task of managing the academic area of their college. While describing dimensions of management behavior by academic vice presidents, places where there was divergence from the presidents will be noted.

This section of the paper will describe management dimensions common to most if not all of the nine people studied. The last section has a series of observations about characteristics of the environment in which the academic vice president worked.

Dimension One. The academic vice presidents emphasized building relationships with both the president and the faculty. It should be noted that this was one of the dimensions found in the study of the presidents in this study as well. Clearly building relationships was important generally throughout upper administrative levels in these colleges. What was meant by building relationships? The academic vice presidents in this study valued in varying degrees, having the opportunity to say, "I never make an appointment to see the President," and, "When I have an idea I can take it to him in the initial stage to just talk it over." In terms of faculty, the academic vice president valued the opportunity to speak with one or all of the faculty and be heard as well as to be able to listen to what faculty have to say. The basis of such relationships was trust--trusting that others were what they appeared to be and that everyone was working together toward common ends. Trust meant what one academic vice president called the "assumed competence of others." In order to build trust, one of the academic vice presidents advised: "Start with a willingness to listen, consult others, show you won't make unilateral decisions, and show leadership." When one of the presidents in this study was asked how trust was built he replied that "you need to be trustworthy over a long period of time." Thus relationships were not easily or quickly built. An observation though was that trust was built into some environments much more than others. The result was that a person in such an environment found

building trust to come faster and easier whereas in some environments trust just could not be built even when a particular person did all the right things to build it.

It is interesting to note that all nine in this study report good to excellent relationships with the president and the faculty. Presidents and faculty interviewed supported this. At least one academic vice president in this study was more of an assistant to the president for academic affairs because the president retained academic leadership. At the other extreme was the academic vice president who had an hour with the president each week plus the cabinet and found it entirely adequate without any intervening conversation. All of the academic vice presidents valued positive relationships with faculty but it is clear that some put much more effort into it and these same people were more successful in seeing a positive relationship develop.

Dimension Two. The academic vice president saw collegial governance as descriptive of their institution. Although a number of the presidents talked about governance it could not be said that a particular style of governance was essential to their management styles. Possibly reflecting that only a minority had done graduate work in management or higher education and experience as a chief academic officer was limited (six of the nine had served in this capacity five years or less), there was widespread confusion between the terms governance, management and leadership. A working definition of governance, then, is essential to the continuation of this discussion. Governance is the process by which an academic community originates, discusses and approves policies and procedures, establishes statements of mission and purpose, and conducts a planning

process by which the institutional priorities are established. In an academic setting governance involves committees, faculty, academic vice presidents and the president who typically involves other administrators in the decision making process. Management in the academic setting includes leadership and addresses how these policies, procedures, statements or mission and planning will be implemented.

Now returning to governance and the academic vice president in this study, governance was seen as "very democratic" in a college where "most decisions [were] made with the approval" of those affected. This vice president commented that "it is slow but there are trade-offs." There is a close relationship between collegial governance and the first dimension's emphasis on relationships with faculty. At this point in the history of higher education it would be the unusual college that had a working collegial governance system without a significant and successful emphasis on positive relationships with faculty.

Dimension Three. Academic leadership rested with the academic vice president in a majority of the colleges. Academic leadership rested with the academic vice president in six colleges although in one or two of these colleges the faculty assumed almost as much of the leadership. Of the other three, in two cases academic leadership seemed to rest with the faculty and in the third clearly with the president.

What causes the difference? Probably the answer lies more with the academic vice president's leadership abilities and his ability to build trust between the faculty and himself. The six included the most assertive personalities, some of the strongest academic programs although not the longest

terms of office as might be expected. This study produced no hint that there would be any objection to stronger academic leadership by vice presidents from faculty, presidents or faculty. In fact, in a college where the leadership seemed to rest with the faculty, the faculty were asking generally for more administrative leadership. In another instance, faculty leaders in an interview said they wanted more academic leadership and were expressing it on their campus.

Each of the academic vice presidents was asked what motivated him to seek and accept the position. Answers given included:

> "academic program development,"
> "working with a dynamic president,"
> having "a significant voice in shaping the agenda for the institution,"
> "to support efforts to increase opportunities for distinctive Christian scholarship and research,"
> "to implement some dreams for Christian higher education that I could not do as a faculty member,"
> "the opportunity and challenge of influencing the direction and development of Christian higher education at an institution with fine resources to make it possible," and
> seeing "the position of Vice President for Academic Affairs at a Christian, liberal arts college as a challenge to excite and inspire an entire faculty to commit themselves deeply" to the "primary task" of developing "Christian perspectives on all academic disciplines."

This is pretty exciting for the future of Christian, liberal arts colleges. It suggests some unrealized potential which fits in with the relatively short tenure (4.9 years) in the position. Those who remain (two have left as of October, 1985) in their position another five years should be able to exert much more academic leadership on their campuses.

Dimension Four. The academic vice president's primary management thrust was for improvement of academic quality. This dimension was evident in several thrusts within the academic program where the academic vice president had shown leadership. They include 1) careful attention to appointment

and tenure of faculty, 2) an emphasis on faith and learning relative to faculty, 3) an emphasis on faith and learning in the curriculum, 4) good teaching, 5) scholarship and writing, 6) increasing the number of doctorates, 7) student advising, and 8) academic quality as a general first priority. The list represents the kind of things academic vice presidents talked about in the interviews as the type of things they would really like to see accomplished.

A few comments on some of these might be helpful. Appointment and tenure of faculty were almost universally talked about extensively in the interviews as significant keys to institutional quality and keeping the college true to its Christian, liberal arts mission. Four of the academic vice presidents talked about how they demand that faculty be able to express how the integration of faith and learning affects their teaching. Scholarship and writing received a lot of attention from those academic vice presidents at the largest institutions where such activity is becoming more important. Rather than the well known "publish or perish" mandate, these colleges are accomplishing this by incentives, financial support and positive reinforcement. While most of these colleges were already strong academically, all seemed destined to become even stronger as these priorities are realized.

Dimension Five. Academic vice presidents emphasized some elements of good management including process, leadership, informal organization, communication, and debate of issues. This parallels three dimensions for the presidents: insistence on good management, delegation and planning. While the academic vice president acknowledged that presidents were effective in delegating to them, they did not talk about their delegating to others. The academic vice

president generally gave a picture of much less planning going on than did the presidents who gave it a high priority.

The aspects of management they did emphasize included process which was mentioned by six of the academic vice presidents. This probably extended to both governance and management with emphasis in the latter on process as opposed to results. This meant considerable emphasis on who considers an issue, in what order and access to information. Specifically, faculty involvement in decisions was important.

Academic leadership was discussed earlier. Informal organization, communication and debate of issues all tied together in how academic vice presidents related to others in the college. They tended to use informal organization routes considerably in communication and decision making. They tended to generate ideas asking for input from others to develop and perfect the concept. In presidents' cabinets academic vice presidents appeared to be the ones most likely not to go along with a group consensus and speak up with other sides of an issue. This might in part have been because the academic vice president was, in more cases than not, the most powerful member of the cabinet after the president. There was probably a corollary between a person's power and self-confidence and a willingness to go out on a limb by dissenting or urging other actions.

IV. Observations

In addition to these five dimensions, there are some other observations about characteristics of the environment in which the academic vice presidents worked. Some of these are values held as opposed to management practices. All contribute to understanding the success of the colleges in the study.

All of the academic vice presidents reported that they are responsible to presidents of their college (the colleges varied in size from 400 to 4000) without an executive vice president although one had a senior vice president who is in charge when the president is away but with no authority over other vice presidents. The presidents included those who travel very little and those who travel a lot. All presidents were strong in the presidential role. As noted earlier, the academic vice president tended to be the second strongest person in the president's cabinet and the most likely to take issue with the president. Most of the academic vice presidents found that the president was, in varying degrees, psychologically removed from the faculty and students while at the same time held in high personal regard by faculty and students. Three colleges had an assistant to the president who, in each case, was helpful to the academic vice presidents rather than competing with him.

Ideas tended to come from all over campus but with little management support for innovation and experimentation. There is some exception to this in terms of successful off campus location, faculty development and new program development. The first tended to come from the president and the second and third somewhat decided between faculty and the academic vice president.

The nine academic vice presidents indicated that they were positive about the future of their colleges. One response given was, "It looks good because our recent past looks good." Specific factors were "curriculum, people matter and not being tuition driven." It's noteworthy that three of the first colleges visited were still building dorms.

In most colleges there was discussion about being a faith affirming college. Several of the vestiges of being faith affirming, such as required chapel, have disappeared from some of the colleges. Nevertheless, there was a feeling that colleges were "far more serious" than they were twenty years earlier. Greater scrutiny seemed to be given to the faith of prospective faculty and more voluntary activities like Bible studies apparently existed at the time of the study than a generation earlier. Faith was seen as being less formal, more student led and more vibrant. No vice president felt that their campus had declined spiritually.

The presidents talked about cabinets and how they use them. The academic vice presidents tended not to see them as being as important as did the presidents. This is possibly because the academic vice president had more communication links with other persons and groups on campus.

There was a tendency for academic vice presidents to arrive at their position by coming up through the ranks. Five of them served in other administrative and teaching capacities at the same college before assuming the vice presidency. Of the remaining four, two came from faculty positions in another college with only two arriving fresh from being an academic vice president elsewhere.

All have dabbled in planning but seem to 1) have not said it is important and 2) have not been particularly successful at it (with one notable exception). Some of the colleges had good segmental planning. The presidents, on the other hand, put more emphasis on planning.

The academic vice presidents were certainly a dedicated lot who wanted the best for their institutions. It can be concluded that the reputation for being well managed was heightened by the work of these talented people.

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